

A note of appreciation:

Thank you for all the support provided by those who take interest in my work and process, and a special thank you to the Leo Marchutz School of Painting and Drawing for inviting me to be the artist of the month of March. I was very lucky in 2007 when as an art student I found this community of artists. I am very grateful for John Gasparach and Alan Roberts, my mentors and my friends, as well as all the artists and supporters dear to my heart.

- Pauline Bétrancourt

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Everything I learned and explored is the result of direct experiences. There is no separation between the theory and the practice as Leo Marchutz himself would say. Everything in the school is interrelated and operates organically, with a great care and respect for each individual's process.

The fundamental principles formulated by Leo Marchutz, carried on and protected by his students, are radical in their way to reconnect someone with their environment, their senses, and to develop their imagination and capacity to see into anything with greater depth, complexity and humility.

I was amused when I first heard John Gasparach quote Yogi Berra's truism, « the more you look, the more you see »...It is very true. Developing my vision and my capacity to see more *into* the visible world radically changed my practice and continues to do so. Now what does that mean?

After graduating from l'Ecole Supérieure d'Art d'Aix-en-Provence, I felt that my figurative practice of painting and drawing needed a few more *fondations*, such as a stronger sense of reality. I created a world of images and turned my eyes inward. I worked a lot from imagination and photographic documents, but something was missing: looking outward. I needed to nurture my imagination by working directly from nature and great works of art.

Early in my training as an art student I understood the primordial function of *dessin* — *drawing* — in any form of art. In French, *dessin* used also to be spelled like *dessein* meaning '*destiny*'. They are intertwined. I finally found a group of artists and a school who still believed in the timeless value of drawing and painting.

By drawing — showing — revealing — this at least 40,000 years old human practice still allows us to engage with a surface to render a vision. It does not get old. In my experience, this utmost expression results in a communion of the hand, sight, spirit and heart. It demands engagement with the totality of one's being to create another being, not just an image. The attention it requires is a form of love and care.

Work on the « whole », keep working « on the whole » I would hear from Alan. In order to render a vision with coherence, I could not ignore any parts. One piece of life changing advice was « keep looking for relationships ». This contains almost everything. It allows infinite truthful observations to give birth to forms from our concrete experiences. Our senses are the primarily source of observation. It requires a close attention to what *is*

present : to notice values, colors, contrasts — similarities, patterns, characters... Bringing the whole vision together and creating meaning by selecting what *is* essential to the work.

Looking for relationships allows each artist to pursue what is so particular to their own vision. What I mean by that is how the « the interior landscape and the exterior landscape » form each other (Barry Lopez). This connection is actually what a French neurologist, Lionel Naccache, calls « Le cinéma intérieur ». In brief, there is a constant back and forth between how we see things and how we conceive them.

A visual meditation is an experience, and meaning is revealed through looking. We use our eyes everyday to navigate our world. But when do we use them to look deeply into the phenomenons of life? When do we stop and appreciate the beauty, the character and mystery of what is not us? This close attention to the visible world and art increases one's sensibility.

I noticed that pursuing wholeness, unity, and relationships in my own practice has a profound effect on my life in general. I acknowledge a lot more how I react to the world. It creates experiences where my subjectivity is constantly in dialogue with what is « other », what is different from me. Yet, there is a commonality and it is rendered in my work when I do not fail.

The virtue of such dialog between me and my motifs is to de-center my attention from myself. And, to open a channel and welcome simultaneously another presence which has a lot to show and teach me. My best work is rendered through that silent dialogue. It needs space.

This is maybe why atmosphere, volume and depth are a necessity in art. They allow space for that conversation. I do not use words but instead colors, values and strokes. Vision precedes words and as Giacometti said « Je ne sais ce que je vois qu'en travaillant » — « I only know what I see as I work ».

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To better talk about my work I would like to show you a selection. I will share different steps of my process and we can start a conversation.

I will use a few photographs of my motifs to give you a context, but you may quickly notice that the photographic vision is very different and it cannot replace what the human eye and imagination can create.

It is difficult to describe with words what happens and I do not mean to be obscure on purpose, but the way a piece comes to life, or fails to, is more related to a visual necessity. What moves me in the first place is literally the definition of a motif : the motif is what causes the movement of my hand and of my whole being. The origin of the motif resides in the configuration of what I see.

Fellow artists have described me as *fencing* when I work. My whole body is engaged. It is a very strange dance. The sensibility and character of each stroke needs to be felt entirely. Listening to music is important to me during these sessions because I use the rhythms and tempo as pulsations and I follow the climaxes. The expansion of music helps me gather the masses and to create the light with vibration and solidity.

Ensemble of trees:

I discovered a group of trees gathered in fellowship. Through their masses and luminosity each one is revealed as an individual. In their expansion in space I see a choreography—an imprint of movements evocative of our own.

I draw the shadows and sculpt the light with percussive strokes to embody the energy of their relationships. The trees are grounded in the earth, reaching outward, relatively immobile. I am pursuing the movement of their growth, fusing their bodies with the density of the air.

Through the abstractions the drawing evokes for me countless movements of life forms: a waiting, loving and gathering, battles...

Nymphéas and dead leaves, Giverny

I saw on the pond a perfect coexistence of a life cycle. In their curves the dead red leaves have their last moment of vibrance and resistance.

They are passing while water lilies are blooming. The relationships between strokes describing curves, arches, vertical blooms and horizontal rest articulate this constant cycle on the surface of water; a mesmerizing mirror and a passage to another world.

A flower is the gravitating life holding everything together. So much gentle strength is in a flower which only lasts a few days. Its color turned into a flame. The luminous effect ignites movement and the whole picture is colors and values fused—painting and drawing fused—incarnating and holding together the forces I sense.

In this motif I see a gathering, something about resilience and resistance, holding to the earth, rising and being innocent again.

Saint-Mandrier sur Mer:

Painting the sun setting while looking in its direction has been a recurrent motif for me. It is challenging as it is the brightest light source and I cannot look at it directly, but I capture glimpses in my peripheral vision. This kind of motif requires a furtive gaze, quick perceptions, and my memory is actively engaged.

For these 2 oil pastels I chose to work on a cream paper. It sets the tone for a warm setting sun atmosphere and I reinforce the luminous effect of the sun with white. All the colors in the sky and on the hill are colored transitions of depth. Each stroke and color are both the matter and the light. Turning light into matter is perhaps a form of alchemy for painters.

Portraits of trees:

I am interested in visual phenomenons of emergence, expansion and grounding. For me, trees are perfect subjects. I pursue their inner volume and density of branches and imagine the tree's interiority.

In their unique shape, I see trees as visual expressions of the *sky to earth relationship*. In their élan, movement, they are giants, or small siblings to me. I am looking at them deploying their force. I paint them as I would paint a portrait.

With oil pastels my gesture and mark making is similar to china marker or charcoal. This is different from painting with oil and brushes as I use pre-mixed batons of colors (though chosen carefully). I need to combine them to create a color harmony by adding layers and fading with thinner, directly on the surface to always break my colors and preserve volume.

The spontaneity of mark making is fundamental as it conveys a more direct relationship with my subject. I am looking for rendering a whole being—a presence and an intimacy. Thus, it can only be done with spontaneous and genuine « touche ».

I will adapt this quote from Martin Bubber in *I and Thou* to the first-person:

« (A man) I am faced by a form which desires to be made through (him) **me** into a work. This form is no offspring of (his) **my** soul, but is an appearance which steps up to it and demands of it the effective power. »

Aix-en-Provence, Cathedral and Mountain:

The central point that I choose to fix my gaze on is the anchor of my motif (it is not necessarily in the exact center). From it, an ordonnance and a choreography are created in my field of vision : the emergence or recession of masses. Some lines of forces appear and become essential. In my peripheral vision elements find their place.

This sentence by Yves Bonnefoy resonates to me « Does the painter "assemble" ["composer"]? To the contrary, he learns not to disassemble [décomposer]. »

Rocks and mountains are also a motif. Compared to us, the mountain is like eternity looking back in our direction, some folded time to traverse.

Lac d'Annecy, Roc de Chère, Steam and Fog:

On the shores of Lac d'Annecy, a body of water at the foot of the Alps, I was attracted by the play of light between elements and the quiet giants surrounding the lake. The Rock de Chère is a very odd bluff covered by a dark green forest. Around sunset the light hits the rock and creates a mesmerizing relationship with water. The vertical cliff stands across the lake facing me as gate.

The sunlight reveals many colors and animates its surface. I use this term *animate* with the original latin meaning of the verb *animare*, meaning “to give life to.” I must capture this transient light. It stands on a threshold. Together, strokes of colors give density to the rock and perpetuates the movement of water. The reflection becomes a path.

I also am fascinated by extremely ephemeral motifs, such as the mist coming off the lake right in front of me. One can imagine my difficulty and how quickly I needed to

render this phenomena. I was moved by the delicate vapor ascending like smoke, filtering the light of a new sun under the sleeping dark water. The columns of mist were dancing in a round.

Similarly I pursued the contrast between mountain and fog and their embrace. Fog and mist are effective agents of unity and they deepen a sense of mystery by quieting down contrast, fusing matter with water and light.

Venice:

In Venice it is difficult not to be intoxicated, not to be ecstatic. It is entering a place suspended in time. The beauty of the architecture and its relations to natural elements is unmatched.

In my drawing I pursue the character of buildings and churches. They are massive and one can feel the uncanny power contained within the walls; a spirituality with an immense beauty mixed with a somber character particular to Venice's history.

« The beautiful is often bizarre » Baudelaire said.

I work with charcoal and china marker on paper. I work quickly, as if Venice itself may disappear—but it still dances. Again, its movements visually express patterns of life; bridges, distances, longing, coming together, all in an encompassing light.

The city has many openings toward an infinite horizon with the architecture as the cliffs. Proust wrote « The buildings arranged along either bank of the canal made one think of objects of nature, but of nature which seemed to have created its work with a human imagination ». I am particularly interested in pursuing this relationship. I perceive Venice as one possible expression of human reconciliation with nature through art.

Now, I will show a series. I use the photographs as a means to show the great variety of sunrises and their unique dramatic tone. They are taken just before I start to mix my palette and to paint. The different versions of the same motifs show how unique each morning is and the evolution of my paintings.

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San Giorgio:

I stand on a little dock where I have enough room to work comfortably.

I paint looking straight in the direction of the sun rising, which again is quite difficult as light to dark relationships immediately shift when the sun is above. San Giorgio stands at the right distance from me so I can envelop it with sky and water.

I am fascinated by the balance between the vertical *campanile*, tower, of San Giorgio and the series of humble elongated buildings on its right. I see in this configuration another grouping of characters. The campanile and white wall of the church visually create a strong sky to ground (and water) relationship. It expresses in its élan, its vertical momentum, something about our own elevation as beings. The group of buildings is much shorter, almost giving ground so this tall figure can rise.

The light, dramatic or quiet during sunrise or sunset, embraces everything with a poignant superposition of layers of time. The water and atmosphere create a visual unity. Venice is a city which makes one's eyes more round.

The cyclical movement of the days, the rolling water, my repeated visits throughout the years, enable me to experience strongly what Van Gogh described « ce qui ne passe pas dans ce qui passe », « what does not pass in what is passing ».

A sensation of eternity can almost be reached in the repetition of painting the same motifs. I am convinced that there is still so much mystery between us and the world.